Ebooks at Bergen University Library?

By Ane Landøy, Susanne Mikki, Therese Skagen and Elin Stangeland,
Bergen University Library

Abstract
The ongoing quality reform in academia in Norway leads to changing user needs for Bergen University Library. This article discusses advantages and disadvantages of ebooks in an academic institution like the University of Bergen (UiB). Strategies for procurement, presentation and use are considered.

Together with most European countries, Norway is currently undergoing a process of quality reform at all her higher learning institutions. What is this process? What implications does it have for the University of Bergen (UiB), and for the Bergen University Library (UBB)?

The quality reform process in Norway is taking place at an unprecedented rate due to the government's decision to legislate the process. By law the new structures must be completely in place for incoming students by the autumn of 2003.

The process of quality reform began to be formalised in the late 90's. First there was the Sorbonne Declaration, signed in May 1998 by a limited number of countries, and then came the Bologna Declaration of June 1999 creating a European sphere for higher education. This latter Declaration is a pledge taken by 29 countries. The countries pledged to reform the structures of their own higher education systems "in such a way that overall convergence emerges from the process at the European level".

The Norwegian situation

The main changes to current Norwegian study programmes are the following:
- ✓ A 3 + 2 degree pattern (3 years for a bachelors degree and an additional 2 years for a masters) as outlined in the Bologna Declaration.
- ✓ A uniform grading scheme for all courses that also fit with the European credit transfer system (ECTS).
- ✓ Better financing for the individual student.
- ✓ Commitment to an individual study plan.
- ✓ A more continuous evaluation of students, and regular feedback to students about their progress.
- ✓ Focus on the educational environments.
- ✓ Students will be offered opportunities to study abroad for a part of their degree.

The result will be a simpler system: study programmes will be of similar lengths, be similarly graded and lead to degrees with similar names. There will also be increased emphasis on student counselling and guidance. Not only will students be evaluated more regularly, but they will be followed more closely as they progress through their individual study programme. This will hopefully result in more students successfully completing their study programmes. The government has also legislated reforms to more actively encourage students to take part in exchange programs with other universities.

The process of quality reform will fundamentally change how students are evaluated. Instead of the traditional style of having one final exam lasting 4-8 hours, the results of which determined a student's entire grade in the course, there will be smaller exams combined with more regular evaluation throughout the course. This change will make a profound difference in teaching and learning styles for both students and teachers. Students will have to increase focus on their studies and work harder.

The library situation

The main challenges for the University Library will be a consequence of the new evaluation forms. We expect changes in demand both when it comes to available printed and electronic resources, and also when it comes to the library premises.

- ✓ The new evaluation form includes more written assignments and collaborative work. Because of this, the students will need access to literature other than the traditional curriculum. The university library is the natural place to turn to, and increased student use of library services is noticeable even before the reform is in place. More students will begin to use the library earlier, and will loan more and varied literature.
- ✓ Increased essay writing will increase the pressure on available university student computers. Students may have to buy their own computers to connect at their study site, or sit at home. Some of the essays are to be group-works. Because of this the need for computer enabled work stations where students may work will increase.
- ✓ Students are also expected to contribute with material relevant to the course (Sydnes, 2002)
- ✓ Even though teachers expect undergraduate students to buy their own course literature, students will still choose to borrow some of it, either for copying or during essay writing.

The sum of all this is an increased demand for strengthening the academic infrastructure, as it will be a more important support for teaching as well as research. The library has seen itself as a research library so far, and this will still be important, but it is expected that the demand for library services will increase dramatically as a consequence of the quality reform.

The library therefore needs to arrange for this, by reorganizing itself into learning centres, offering different types of working places for the students, i.e. computer workstations, reading places, group, teamwork facilities etc. Traditional library and IT resources also need to be organized, and all these should be facilitated from an educational perspective (Fagerli, 2000).

The role of ebooks

At the Bergen University Library a task force was formed in January 2003, with the aim to:

> *"(…) map the situation regarding electronic books and evaluate the future role for UBB concerning the procuring, presentation and use of such books for UiB. This must be seen in connection with the changing needs following the reform. "Electronic books" in this connection is understood as books that may become available over the University net (Internet) at ordinary computers (PC, Mac, UNIX) without special hard- or software. (…)" (Mikki, Hamre, Skagen, Landøy, & Stangeland, 2003, s. 1).*

After 6 weeks of hard work, the group concluded in the report:

> *"Because there is no standard format, not all books may be distributed electronically yet, but the market is growing fast and one will probably see the same development for the ebook-market as one has seen for electronic journals. It turns out that the distributors are co-operating partly with the same publishers, and this leads to a certain amount of overlap between different ebook-aggregators. It is important to be aware of this and try to avoid buying the same product twice" (Mikki et al., 2003, s. 19).*

Advantages of ebooks:

The most important advantages, seen from our perspective, are the:

- ✓ Support for problem-based learning
- ✓ Efficiency in the learning and research process
- ✓ Enhanced availability
- ✓ Profiling of the University and its library
- ✓ Development of the digital collections

Ebooks have a pedagogical value in themselves and support problem based learning by giving the user access to reference tools, thesauruses, interactive software etc. This is an advantage when seen in connection with pedagogical development, and the transformation of libraries into learning centres.

Ebooks also meet the demand for more efficiency within teaching and research by being more available, offering possibilities for searching within texts, in multiple databases, combined with bibliographical tools and implemented software etc.

The enhanced availability comes from the internet being open 24/7, from site-licences (ebrary) or control over loan time (netLibrary). One will also see an enhanced availability for distance-students, foreign students and e.g. handicapped students.

Ebooks may also function as part of the profiling of a university. As Norwegian institutions of higher education meet the growing competition from abroad, good and modern library services will be seen as an asset.

Subscribing to different ebook databases will lead to a growth in the collection. I.e. the ebrary database today consists of 20 000 volumes. We expect this number to increase as the database grows without the books having to be specifically ordered.

The physical processing and shelving of books will be reduced, also the need for shelves and storage.

Possible problems with ebooks:

The most important of these are:
- ✓ The service is expensive
- ✓ Unresolved issues as to archival access
- ✓ Interlibrary loan not allowed
- ✓ Content quality
- ✓ Lack of bibliographical control

✓ No integration with the Norwegian library catalogue service BIBSYS

Access to an electronic book will often be offered in addition to the printed document. Most ebook distributors have for the time being expensive subscription agreements. In addition to this, administration and marketing etc of the ebooks may lead to a need for extra staff when the new services are to be implemented.

Several of the distributors do not guarantee archival access when the service is no longer paid for. This means that UBB does not own the ebooks, and notes and other value adding features that the users have used will disappear.

At the moment it is not possible to have interlibrary loan of complete ebooks. This may be possible for single chapters. The answer to this may be for the libraries to enter into consortia where everyone can access each others digital collections.

The content of many of the ebook databases were initially focused on an American audience. This is still a problem for European customers, but both ebrary and netLibrary are interested in co-operation with European and Norwegian publishers.

Finding out if certain books also are available in ebook format may be quite time consuming. One may find some information in WorldCat, but this service alone may not be used for verifying electronic books.

BIBSYS is currently struggling with a lack of resources, and is therefore not able to import bibliographic data from ebook-packages in the near future. This means that new ebook titles will have to be manually registered, or users must be taught to search in several sources when in need of information.

Other libraries and the ebooks

So far there are few evaluations of ebooks, but the trend seems to be that libraries offer ebooks through different distributors, netLibrary, ebrary and others.

In the following we shall concentrate on evaluations of ebooks that do not require physical reading tools.

In 2003 a few of the Norwegian universities have purchased ebooks, and their use has not been evaluated yet. The Göteborg University Library was among the first in Europe to acquire ebooks, from netLibrary. They report from a user evaluation made in 2001(Cavallin & Björklund, 2001). It showed that active users of electronic journals sooner started using electronic books. Most of the loaners did not read the complete book, but used the ebook to assess the printed book, and see if she wanted to buy the printed book. This is supported by a study of how netLibrary is used. The mean time used at reading an ebook is 10 – 20 minutes; a netLibrary book is used 5 – 15 minutes.

A study has also been done among librarians in Britain (Armstrong, Edwards, & Lonsdale, 2002) and at American libraries (Snowhill, 2001). Ebooks are seen as good supplements to printed documents. The main advantages of ebooks are considered to be the search functions, the availability and the updating. Patrons also borrow and return the books themselves and avoid having to carry the heavy books.

The main disadvantages mentioned in these evaluations are shortcomings when it comes to content offered. The distributors do not always offer titles the libraries and/or the universities consider necessary.

Strategies for buying ebooks

In Jandér (2002) we find principles Texas University Library and California Digital Library have put down for buying ebooks.
- ✓ The ebooks must be user friendly, and must be readable both on- and offline
- ✓ Expert knowledge must not be necessary
- ✓ Libraries should avoid buying books that require particular software
- ✓ The contents should be identical to the original, if one digitizes printed material
- ✓ Extra functions – advanced search-functions, linking and the possibility of making bookmarks must be included.

It will be important to be market oriented and see what happens at other libraries. We also need to develop competence, and encourage the university staff to use ebooks. Knowledge of use is necessary in order to have influence over the development of ebook services. The library needs to cooperate both with publishers and with copyright organisations.

We also should cooperate with other libraries in order to reduce costs and problems during implementation. Co-operation within the University, with the teaching staff, is also necessary to achieve a successful result. This will help when introducing a new service and will make it easier for the librarians to facilitate its use.

From our point of view, libraries considering buying ebooks have four possible choices:
- ✓ To wait and see how the markets develop, and what other libraries are doing
- ✓ Cooperate with other libraries, i.e. by creating consortiums. When several partners negotiate with distributors and publishers there is an opportunity to gain lower prices and enhanced efficiency.
- ✓ Cooperate with publishers. The library becomes a partner and may influence the development of ebook collections.
- ✓ Produce their own ebooks, i.e. where copyright laws allow it.

Strategies for the presentation of ebooks

Different strategies have been used for marketing ebooks at different libraries. The most common is to link from the library homepage to the distributor, and to incorporate bibliographic posts in the library's OPAC. Other channels that are frequently used are marketing through interorganizational publications, leaflets, e-mails targeting special groups and also including information about e-books in the library courses. Marketing and teaching will affect the use of ebooks. This must be taken into account when evaluating such a service (Snowhill, 2001).

When UBB starts using ebooks on a larger scale for the first time a major task will be to make sure that all potential users, or as many as possible, are informed about the new service. This must be done by using several channels concurrently.

- ✓ E-mails must be sent to all university staff, informing them about the service
- ✓ Follow-up articles must be published in university journals and newspapers, targeting both students and staff
- ✓ The different faculty libraries must use their departmental contacts
- ✓ Information about ebooks must also be presented on the library main homepage as well on the homepages of the respective faculty libraries.

Some ebook vendors offer marketing material.

Further work

After the initial presentation, ebooks must be made available from several points on the library web and homepages:

- ✓ They should be easy to locate in the library catalogue
- ✓ The library's electronic resources website
- ✓ Both the new student portal, and an eventual library portal at UBB

Bergen University Library will also collaborate with other academic libraries in Norway, forming ebook consortia.

Bibliography

Armstrong, C., Edwards, L., & Lonsdale, R. (2002). Virtually there? E-books in the UK academic libraries. *Electronic library and information systems, 36*(4), 216-227.

Cavallin, M., & Björklund, C. (2001). *Introducing electronic books at Gøteborg University*. Retrieved 30.10, 2003, from http://www.ub.gu.se/Gdig/projekt/paperfinalrev.pdf

Fagerli, H. M. (2000). *En arena for læring og samarbeid: om bibliotekfaglige og pedagogiske utfordringer i læringssentermodellen*.

Jandér, K. (2002). 2001-ett e-äventyr. Vägval och strategier ved implementering av e-boken i det vetenskapeliga biblioteket. *Tidsskrift för dokumentation, 57*(4), 121-129.

Mikki, S., Hamre, E., Skagen, T., Landøy, A., & Stangeland, E. (2003). *Ebøker ved UIB*. (Bergen: Bergen University Library)

Snowhill, L. (2001). *E-books and their future in academic libraries*. Retrieved 7/8, 7, from http://www.dlib.org/dlib/july01/snowhill/07snowhill.html

Sydnes, L. (2002). *Kvalitetsreformen har utfordringer til alle*. Retrieved 28.10, 2003, from http://www.uib.no/elin/elpub/uibmag/0203/utsyn.html